Show the Files

The District Magistrates, the Unclaimed Dead, and the Records That Must Now Be Opened

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Plain-English renderings are mine.

Excerpt

The police were the visible hand.

But the district was not meant to be governed by police alone.

There was also the civil administration: the Deputy Commissioner, the District Magistrate, the magistracy, inquest procedure, municipal records, cremation-ground registers, firewood records, and the office files through which suspicious deaths and unidentified bodies were supposed to pass.

If the civil administration acted, show the files.

If it did not, explain why.

If the files are missing, say so officially, because the missing file now stands beside the dead.

ਰਤਨ ਵਿਗਾੜਿ ਵਿਗੋਏ ਕੁਤੀਂ ਮੁਇਆ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਕਾਈ ॥

Ratan vigaar vigoe kuteen, muia saar na kai.

Plain-English sense: The jewels were ruined and laid waste by dogs, and no one heeded the dead.

Raag Asa, Mahala 1, Babar Vani, Ang 360.

In brief

This piece is a documentary record.

It establishes, from statute and the public record, that the District Magistrate's office in Panjab carried legal duties over suspicious death, custodial death, and the records through which unidentified bodies passed.

It records that the CBI/NHRC record, remitted by the Supreme Court, identified 2,097 illegal cremations at three Amritsar district grounds between 1984 and 1994, within a wider documented pattern across Panjab.

It records that the concealment was broken not by the ordinary civil machinery but by Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra reading the State's own registers. He was then abducted and murdered. Five life convictions were ultimately upheld.

It records, as statements, the public account of S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji, District Magistrate of Amritsar from 1992 to 1996, including the magisterial inquiry he says he ordered after the abduction, whose file has yet to be located and released.

It asks for eleven things, chiefly: the full CBI report, the September 1995 inquiry file, the Section 174 and Section 176 records, the municipal cremation-ground registers, and a statutory forum where surviving officers can give sworn evidence.

Readers with limited time may read Sections I, IV, and VII.

The police were the visible hand.

But the district was not meant to be governed by police alone.

There was also the civil administration: the Deputy Commissioner, the District Magistrate, the magistracy, inquest procedure, municipal records, cremation-ground registers, firewood records, and the office files through which suspicious deaths and unidentified bodies were supposed to pass.

This piece asks a plain question.

When bodies were brought to cremation grounds as “unidentified” or “unclaimed,” what did the civil administration do?

Did it receive the reports? Did it read the registers? Did it order inquiries? Did it audit the pattern? Did it write upwards? Did it challenge the police classification? Did it keep minutes, notes, correspondence, and files?

If it did, show the files.

If it did not, explain why.

If the files are missing, say so officially, because the missing file now stands beside the dead.

The possible explanations are grave. There may have been fear. There may have been incapacity. There may have been incompetence. There may have been wilful blindness. There may have been something worse. Without the files, no honest writer should claim to know which explanation is true.

But without the files, no honest public record can pretend the civil question has been answered.

A District Magistrate is not appointed only to remember decades later. The office exists to keep records at the time. Civil servants are trained

to minute, record, question, report, and preserve the paper trail by which the State knows what is happening inside a district.

So this is not a personal prosecution by article. It is a demand for the record.

The police record asks who took, held, killed, and disposed of Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra.

The civil record asks another question: who was required to know, record, inquire, audit, report, and act when the dead were being entered as unclaimed?

That question does not belong to one murder alone, however high-profile. It belongs to all the disappearances, all the suspicious deaths, all the alleged encounters, all the bodies entered in registers, and all the families still waiting for names.

This is the register.

A note on method

This piece distinguishes four things.

First, what a court, commission, official investigation, or public record has found.

Second, what a named person has publicly said, which is reported as that person's statement and nothing more.

Third, what follows from statute or public office.

Fourth, what remains a question.

No civil officer is charged here. No motive is imputed here. No unsupported accusation is made here. But public office carries public memory, and public memory must be tested against files, not private recollection alone.

This piece places duty beside record.

The reader can judge what the record shows, what it fails to show, and what must now be opened.

I. The office in law

In Panjab in those years, the Deputy Commissioner of a district was also its District Magistrate.

Under Section 4 of the Police Act, 1861, the administration of the district police within the local jurisdiction of the District Magistrate was vested in the District Superintendent of Police under the general control and direction of the District Magistrate.

That does not mean the District Magistrate personally ran every police operation. It does mean the civil authority was not an ordinary bystander to the district police system.

Under Section 174 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, where a person had been killed, had died unnaturally, or had died in circumstances raising reasonable suspicion, the police had to inform the nearest Executive Magistrate empowered to hold inquests, investigate the apparent cause of death, describe injuries and marks on the body, and forward the report to the District Magistrate or Sub-Divisional Magistrate.

Section 176 is even more important. As it stood in the relevant years, where any person died while in police custody, the nearest Magistrate empowered to hold inquests was required to hold an inquiry into the cause of death, either instead of, or in addition to, the police investigation. In other Section 174 cases, such a Magistrate could also hold an inquiry. The later Section 176(1-A), inserted by Act 25 of 2005 and in force from 23 June 2006, added a judicial-magistrate inquiry route for custodial death, disappearance, or rape allegations while in custody.

The point for the 1990s is still the same: death, custody, suspicious classification, and police explanation were not meant to sit inside the police record alone.

The NHRC itself later stated, in the Punjab Mass Cremation case, that many identified bodies had been cremated by the police without following Punjab Police Rules, guidelines, practice, and humanitarian law. This article therefore uses the NHRC's own wording on this point rather than citing rule numbers directly. The point is simpler: unidentified bodies were not meant to disappear into fire without record.

The district had an office. The office had duties. The duties were supposed to leave files.

II. What the public record established

Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra and those working with him forced open a record that should not have needed a private citizen to find it.

In January 1995, human-rights activists released official records exposing mass secret cremations by the Punjab Police in Amritsar district from 1984 to 1994. After Bhai Khalra Ji was abducted and murdered, the Supreme Court ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation to investigate.

Human Rights Watch records that the CBI report disclosed 2,097 illegal cremations at three cremation grounds first identified by Bhai Khalra Ji: Durgiana Mandir, Patti, and Tarn Taran.

In December 1996, the Supreme Court referred the mass-cremations matter to the National Human Rights Commission. The NHRC's own 3 April 2012 release says the case concerned 2,097 unidentified bodies remitted by the Supreme Court by order dated 12 December 1996, and that monetary relief was recommended for the next of kin of 1,513 identified deceased. The release describes these as including 195 deemed police-custody cases and 1,318 other identified cases

whose bodies had been cremated by the police and later stood identified.

One clarification is necessary. The official record is sometimes described through the three cremation grounds of Durgiana Mandir, Patti, and Tarn Taran, and sometimes through the police districts of Amritsar, Majitha, and Tarn Taran. Those police districts sat within the wider Amritsar revenue-district context in those years. The point here is not a cartographic technicality. It is the same public record-world around the Amritsar district cremation cases.

These figures do not complete the truth. They show the scale of the record that was opened.

The public record also establishes the murder of Bhai Khalra Ji. He was abducted on 6 September 1995. The Supreme Court record states that evidence showed he was secretly murdered and his body thrown into the canal near Harike.

The conviction chain is this. On 18 November 2005, the trial court convicted six Punjab Police officials. DSP Jaspal Singh and ASI Amarjit Singh were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment; four others were convicted for conspiracy and abduction and sentenced to seven years. In 2007, the Punjab and Haryana High Court dismissed the appeals except in the case of Amarjit Singh, who was acquitted, and, in the connected revision filed by Bibi Paramjit Kaur Khalra Ji, enhanced the four seven-year sentences to life imprisonment. The net position after 2007 was five life convictions. On 4 November 2011, the Supreme Court upheld the convictions and sentences.

That case identified police responsibility for the murder.

It did not answer the whole civil-administration question.

The registers were not only police memory. They were part of a public record-world.

The Tribune reported on 6 July 2026, quoting Advocate Sarabjit Singh Verka, that the CBI registered around seventy FIRs in 2001 arising from the cremations, that sanction for prosecution was finally granted in 2020 after Supreme Court intervention, and that sixty-four of seventy cases had been decided, with only one acquittal. The same report said approximately 135 police personnel had been sentenced in cases arising from the pursuit of justice begun by Bhai Khalra Ji. These figures are useful, but they are reported claims and should be treated as such unless each is independently checked against judgments and primary records.

The point here is not to settle every later prosecution figure. The point is record: a large body of deaths passed through official and cremation-ground systems, and the public record remains incomplete.

III. Amritsar was the opening, not the whole wall

The record should not be allowed to remain trapped inside one district.

Amritsar matters because Bhai Khalra Ji and those working with him forced open the cremation-ground record there. The three grounds named in the official proceedings gave the Panth a hard number, a public register, and a route into court.

But Amritsar was never the whole story.

Wider human-rights work points beyond those three grounds. Ensaaf's data project records at least 5,316 enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions in Punjab. Punjab Disappeared states that it accessed information on 6,140 cremations across fifteen of Punjab's twenty-two districts and over 1,400 police FIRs of alleged encounters or escapes from custody, and that its case studies showed systematised disappearances, killings, and illegal cremations across all twenty-two districts of Punjab.

These figures should not be collapsed into one total. Some count cremations. Some count disappearances. Some count extrajudicial executions. Some arise from official proceedings. Some arise from interviews, petitions, recovered records, or human-rights documentation. District boundaries also changed.

The purpose of comparison is not arithmetic.

It is pattern.

If the pattern travelled across Panjab, then the civil-administration question also travels across Panjab. Every district had a Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate. Every district had executive magistrates. Every district had police stations sending reports. Every district had files, inquest papers, post-mortem records where required, cremation or burial arrangements, local bodies, and public offices through which the disposal of unidentified bodies could leave a trace.

So the question is not only what one officer remembers.

The question is whether the civil administration of Panjab, district by district, kept, read, tested, and acted on the records it was built to keep.

Where are the Section 174 inquest reports?

Where are the Section 176 magisterial inquiries?

Where are the unidentified-body descriptions and photographs?

Where are the municipal cremation-ground registers and firewood records?

Where are the district-level audits?

Where are the letters from district offices to the State Government warning that the pattern was abnormal?

Where are the files showing that the civil administration tested the police classification of “unclaimed” or “unidentified”?

If such files exist, they should be opened.

If such files do not exist, the absence is itself part of the record.

This piece does not say every civil officer was complicit. It does not say every civil officer knew. It does not say every officer had the same power, courage, fear, or choice. A civil officer who tried to move against police power in that era may have faced real professional and personal risk. That too belongs in an honest record.

But the office still had duties.

The dead were entered as unclaimed.

The register now asks who was required to read the register.

IV. The published account and the office questions

The film has brought the police record back into public view. It has also brought the civil record to the surface, because some who held civil office in that era have now spoken.

That is useful. A public memory can point toward a file. It cannot replace the file.

On 5 July 2026, S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji, IAS (Retd.), published and circulated an essay on the shahadat of Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra. He wrote as a former senior civil servant who had served as Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate, Amritsar, during the years in which the Khalra case and the wider cremation-ground questions arose. India Today also identified him as Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar from 1992 to 1996, when Tarn Taran was part of the district. The official Amritsar district list spells his name as “Karanbir Singh

Sidhu"; this article uses the spaced form "Karan Bir Singh Sidhu" where following his own public usage.

His essay honoured Bhai Khalra Ji's shahadat. It accepted the broad judicial record. It also stated, from his own recollection, that in the week of the abduction his office ordered a magisterial inquiry through the Additional District Magistrate, Tarn Taran, that statements were recorded, and that these were later re-recorded by the CBI. India Today also reported him as saying that he ordered a magisterial inquiry the very next day after the abduction.

He has himself noted that he is aware of no published account that independently narrates these actions, which is precisely why the file, and not the memory, must now carry the record.

That is a serious statement.

It is also an important opening. If such an inquiry was ordered, then the question is no longer only whether a former officer remembers it. The question is where the file is.

A magisterial inquiry is not a private memory. It is an act of office. It should leave a trace: date, order, provision, officer, statements, report, forwarding note, correspondence, and later reference in court or investigation records. If the file exists, it should be located. If it was placed before the CBI, the trial court, or the Supreme Court, its path should be traceable. If it cannot be found, that absence must itself be recorded.

On 7 July 2026, S. Sidhu Ji also published a careful note on the legal status of Kuldeep Singh SPO, the insider witness on whose testimony the courts relied in the Khalra murder trial, distinguishing accomplice, approver, and star witness. That distinction may be useful. But it also sharpens the point of this piece. If the criminal record can be examined with that level of care, the civil record must be examined with the same care. The question is not only what Kuldeep Singh was in law. The question is what the District Magistrate's office received,

recorded, asked, audited, and sent upward when bodies were passing through public registers as unidentified or unclaimed.

On 6 July 2026, I put three questions to S. Sidhu Ji on his own circulation. I did so because he had spoken publicly, and because the office he held was not peripheral to the district's legal machinery.

The first question concerned the magisterial inquiry he recalled: its date, legal provision, file reference, present location, and whether he would support its release.

The second concerned the wider district record: how many Section 176 inquiries were held into deaths in police custody in the district during the relevant years, and how many Section 174 inquest reports concerned bodies later cremated as unclaimed or unidentified at the district's three grounds.

The third concerned the unfinished public record: whether he would support full publication of the CBI report on the cremations, and completion of identification and compensation for the families.

His reply came the same day. I summarise it here in substance. The full exchange is preserved and can be shared where fairness requires.

He stated that he holds no personal file and does not carry the particulars in memory. He said the record of the inquiry would, in the ordinary course, be with the office of the District Magistrate, Amritsar, and that the Supreme Court record and the trial court record at Patiala would also carry reference to it. He stated that inquests under Section 174 would, to the best of his understanding, have been conducted in most cases described by the police as encounters. He stated that Section 176 inquiries were held in virtually all custodial deaths that came to his notice. He also stated that, should any statutory inquiry or commission be constituted, he would appear and testify fully and on oath.

That offer to testify is important. It should be recorded fairly. A former District Magistrate saying that he will give evidence under oath before a statutory forum is not nothing. It is a commitment, and it should be preserved.

On 7 July 2026, in a public reply on his own page, S. Sidhu Ji added that the file was never in his personal custody, even as the inquiry proceeded, that he demitted charge in August 1996, and that the record belongs in the official custody chain: the office of the Deputy Commissioner, the Punjab State Archives, and the trial court record. He stated that he would welcome findings from that trail being placed on record, and that he would engage with them in good faith.

Answering a reader the same day, he explained that the system of post-mortem, inquest, and cremation was designed to run through police and municipal machinery rather than case-by-case scrutiny by the Deputy Commissioner, and said that whether the gap reflects the structure of the process or a broader failure of imagination on the part of the administration is, in his words, a fair question to sit with.

But the answer does not close the record.

It opens it.

The phrase “that came to my notice” is central. The whole question of the era is whether deaths, cremations, and classifications were allowed not to come to civil notice, or whether the notice existed but did not produce the inquiry, audit, alarm, and public record that the facts required.

The answer also points us to the places where the files should be: the District Magistrate’s office, the Punjab State Archives, the trial court record, and the Supreme Court record.

That means the next step is not argument.

It is retrieval.

V. Duty beside record

The question now is not whether one former officer remembers every file after three decades. No one should be asked to do that from memory alone.

The question is whether the office left the record that the office was built to leave.

A district is not run by memory. It is run by files, reports, orders, registers, inquests, correspondence, and audits. That is why the civil-administration question matters. If the police were bringing bodies to cremation grounds as unidentified or unclaimed, the civil state had several points at which the pattern could have been seen, tested, questioned, or recorded.

The police may have held the lathi and the gun. The civil administration held the files.

That sentence should not be read as an accusation against any individual. It is a description of institutional duty.

If a body was said to be unidentified, where was the description?

If a death was said to be an encounter, where was the inquest?

If police custody was involved, where was the mandatory magisterial inquiry?

If the same cremation grounds were repeatedly receiving bodies brought by the police as unclaimed, where was the district-level alarm?

If municipal cremation registers and firewood records existed, where is the file showing that the civil administration read them, audited them, or asked why the pattern was so large?

These questions do not require us to decide motive. They require us to ask for the file.

The record available to the public shows that the concealment was not broken by the ordinary civil machinery of the district. It was broken by Bhai Khalra Ji, a man without the power of office, who went to the cremation-ground registers and read what the State's own paperwork had recorded.

That is the fact that must not be softened.

The registers were not secret writings hidden in a forest. They belonged to the public record-world of the district. They sat beside receipts, police entries, and administrative procedure. Yet the pattern became visible to the Panth and to the courts because Bhai Khalra Ji read them, not because the district administration publicly exposed them.

If the civil administration had already noticed the pattern, the file should show it.

If it ordered inquiries, the files should show them.

If it wrote upwards to the State Government, the correspondence should show it.

If it audited the cremation grounds, the audit should show it.

If it challenged the police classification of bodies as unclaimed or unidentified, the note should show it.

If none of this exists, then the absence is part of the record.

That absence may have more than one explanation. It may reflect fear. It may reflect pressure. It may reflect incapacity. It may reflect a system in which civil authority had been hollowed out by police power. It may reflect deliberate refusal. It may reflect something else.

Without the files, no honest writer should assert which explanation is true.

But without the files, no honest public record can pretend the question has been answered.

This is why the phrase in S. Sidhu Ji's reply matters: deaths that came to his notice. A District Magistrate cannot inquire into what is successfully hidden from him. But the whole issue is whether such deaths and cremations were hidden from the civil administration, or whether the records by which they could have been known were present but not acted upon.

That is not a personal question first. It is an office question.

What was meant to come to notice?

What did come to notice?

What should have come to notice?

What did the office do with what came?

The same test should be applied to the magisterial inquiry he says was ordered after Bhai Khalra Ji's abduction. If it exists, it should have a date, file reference, legal basis, recorded statements, report, forwarding trail, and a place in the later investigative or court record.

If it is in the District Magistrate's office, it should be found there.

If it went to the CBI, it should be traceable there.

If it went into the trial court record at Patiala, it should be identifiable there.

If it is referred to in Supreme Court material, the reference should be located.

If it cannot now be found, that too should be recorded, because a missing inquiry file in a case of this importance is itself a public fact.

This is not about humiliating an officer.

It is about restoring the record.

The same applies to Section 174 inquest papers and Section 176 inquiries. If most alleged encounter cases had inquests, as S. Sidhu Ji understands, then the list can be produced. If custodial deaths that came to civil notice received Section 176 inquiries, then the number can be counted. If bodies later included in the mass-cremation record had inquest papers behind them, those papers can be identified. If they do not exist, the absence must be explained.

Some files may show that an officer acted. Some may show that a magistrate asked questions. Some may show that a file was blocked higher up. Some may show that police reporting was false. Some may show that civil authority was bypassed. Some may show negligence. Some may show fear. Some may show something worse.

That is why the files matter.

They may condemn. They may exonerate. They may complicate. But without them, public memory is left to fight with recollection, and recollection is too weak a vessel for the dead.

No district administration has yet placed before the public a complete contemporaneous table of inquests, magisterial inquiries, unidentified-body procedures, cremation records, and police classifications for those years.

So this is not one man’s shadow alone.

It is a class of offices.

This article therefore does not say: they turned a blind eye.

It says: show the record that they did not.

That is the disciplined Sikh position here. Firm, but not reckless. Nirbhau, but not hateful.

The dead were entered as unclaimed.

The police record must answer who took them.

The civil record must answer who read the register.

VI. The film and the files

The film has now become part of the record.

On 3 July 2026, *Satluj* was released on ZEE5. Within two days, it was removed from the platform's Indian catalogue and marked unavailable in India until further notice, while reporting states it remained available abroad through ZEE5 Global. The film had already passed through years of certification struggle, including reporting that it had earlier been titled *Punjab '95* and before that associated with the title *Ghallughara*.

By 8 July 2026, reporting had moved further. Some reports described the takedown as having followed government direction on security and IT Rules grounds; others said the film was being referred to a high-level Inter-Departmental Committee under the Information Technology Rules, 2021, with possible further action to be considered. The Ministry position was also reported as being that the film had been released on OTT before the certification process was complete. These are recorded here as proceedings and reported positions, not as findings.

The removal matters because the film does not concern a rumour. It concerns an established story: the abduction and murder of Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra, and the mass-cremation record that he helped force into public view. One may debate a film's artistic choices. One may ask whether every scene is exact. One may discuss whether

cinema simplifies what files complicate. But the core story is not fiction.

On 6 July 2026, India Today reported sharply different responses from people connected with the Khalra case. Advocate Navkiran Singh, who acted in the Khalra matter, called the removal wrong and said the film showed the truth. S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji was reported as saying that the film's story was true and established during the CBI investigation, while also suggesting that the removal may have been influenced by peace and law-and-order concerns. In an essay of 7 July 2026 he set out his position more fully: that the film should not have been released in this form after the certification process, that the removal might nonetheless prove counterproductive, and that Panjab's history should be told whole.

That is the point at which the civil record returns.

If the film is based on an established record, then the established record should be opened more fully, not hidden from the very public whose history it is. If there is anxiety about public order, then the answer is not less truth. The answer is more record, more precision, more identification, more accountability, and more disciplined public memory.

The State cannot say, in effect, that the truth is too dangerous for the people and then leave the people with fragments, rumours, sealed reports, missing files, incomplete identification, and closed registers.

Rumour grows where record is withheld.

A film may bring memory back to the surface. It cannot complete the work of the record. It cannot identify every body. It cannot publish a hidden file. It cannot explain why a magistracy did or did not act. It cannot tell every family where their dead were taken.

Only the record can begin that work.

If the film is wrong, say where it is wrong, with record.

If the film is incomplete, complete the record.

If the film is true, let India see what was done in India.

The Panth does not need rumour. It needs the register.

The families do not need another argument about law and order. They need names, files, findings, and answers.

The film was removed.

The files remain.

Open them.

VII. What must now be opened

The question cannot be left as memory.

It cannot be left as a film. It cannot be left as a private recollection. It cannot be left as a court judgment in one murder case. It cannot be left as compensation files, partial identifications, and scattered reports.

The dead were entered into registers. The answer must also come through registers.

What must now be opened is the record.

First, the full CBI report on the cremations must be published, with its annexures, schedules, cremation-ground details, police-station references, names where identified, categories where unidentified, and the basis on which the figures were reached. If parts must be redacted for lawful reason, the reason should be stated. But the report itself should not remain a shadow.

Second, the September 1995 magisterial-inquiry record that S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji says was ordered after Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra’s

abduction must be located and released. That means the order, date, provision, file number, officer appointed, statements recorded, report prepared, forwarding note, and any later movement of the file to the CBI, the trial court, the Supreme Court record, or the Punjab State Archives. If the file exists, open it. If it was transferred, trace it. If it is missing, say so officially.

Third, the Section 174 inquest record must be opened. If bodies were described as killed in encounters, unidentified, or unclaimed, where are the inquest reports? Which police stations prepared them? Which magistrates received them? Which bodies were photographed or described? Which were sent for post-mortem? Which were cremated? Which names were later identified?

Fourth, the Section 176 magisterial-inquiry record must be opened. If custodial deaths came to notice, how many inquiries were ordered? By whom? Into which deaths? What findings were reached? If the answer is that only certain deaths came to notice, then the next question is unavoidable: what was the system by which such deaths were meant to come to notice, and why did so many not do so?

Fifth, the municipal cremation-ground registers and firewood records must be preserved, digitised, and opened under proper safeguards. These were not abstract documents. They were the public paper trail through which the dead passed. They should be treated as evidence, memory, and unfinished duty.

Sixth, the district correspondence must be found. If the civil administration noticed an abnormal pattern, there should be notes, letters, reports, warnings, inspection records, or upward communication to the State Government. If such correspondence exists, produce it. If it does not exist, then the absence must be recorded plainly. Silence in an office is also a form of record when the office was built to speak.

Seventh, the files relating to prosecution sanction, delay, and trial progress must be made public as far as law permits. If cases were

delayed because sanction was withheld, the public should know who withheld it, when, on what basis, and with what consequences. Delay is not neutral when witnesses die, families lose hope, and the dead remain unnamed.

Eighth, the remaining identifications and relief must be completed. The families do not need another ceremony of regret. They need names, files, findings, death records, corrected entries, and relief where relief remains due.

Ninth, a statutory forum should be created before which surviving civil and police officers can give sworn evidence. This should include those who held office in the districts, those who supervised police administration, those who handled inquests, those who managed cremation-ground or municipal records, and those who dealt with prosecution sanction. The offer by S. Sidhu Ji to testify on oath should be honoured. So should the right of families to ask what happened to their sons.

Tenth, the film should be restored to Indian audiences. If the film is false, answer it with record. If it is incomplete, complete the record. If it is true in its central account, then the public should not be protected from its own history by making the history harder to see.

Eleventh, the questions must now travel district by district. Amritsar was the opening in the wall, not the whole wall. A schedule should be prepared for each district: the relevant period, the Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate, the relevant sub-divisions, the police stations, the cremation or burial grounds, the inquest files, the magisterial inquiries, the municipal records, and the state correspondence. This schedule should not accuse. It should identify where the files should be.

I am not publishing a named schedule of silent civil office-holders here. That schedule should be prepared for the record and for any statutory forum, beginning with the documented 1984 to 1994 cremation window and the Amritsar district record. But where living

persons who have not entered the present public discussion are to be named, fairness and legal prudence require further review and an opportunity for reply. The point of this article does not depend on publishing a table of names. It depends on the office records being opened.

No civil officer is charged here. No motive is imputed here. No unsupported accusation is made here. But public office carries public memory. A Deputy Commissioner, District Magistrate, Additional District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Executive Magistrate, Civil Surgeon, municipal officer, police officer, Home Department official, or sanctioning authority does not disappear from the record because time has passed. The office remains answerable through its files.

The question is not whether one officer remembers. The question is whether the civil administration kept, read, tested, and acted upon the records it was built to keep.

If the police were the visible hand, the civil state was the file.

If the file was used, show it.

If the file was not used, explain why.

If the file is missing, let the missing file be recorded beside the dead.

This is not revenge. It is not disorder. It is not a demand that memory replace evidence. It is the opposite. It is a demand that evidence replace memory, that records replace rumour, and that the State stop asking the families to live with fragments.

The Panth also has its own duty. No ministry can do this part for us. We must keep the register. We must not let the dead become numbers only. We must not let a film do the work that institutions refused. We must not let one widow, one lawyer, one witness, one activist, or one family carry the memory alone.

The dead were entered as unclaimed.

They were not unclaimed.

The register must now be opened until that lie has nowhere left to stand.

For Bhai Jaswant Singh Ji Khalra, and for the counted and the uncounted dead.

Verification note

Checked 6 July 2026 and rechecked 7 July 2026, with the film-proceedings paragraph in Section VI checked against reporting of 7 and 8 July 2026.

The Gurbani epigraph is from Ang 360, Raag Asa, Mahala 1, Guru Nanak Sahib, Babar Vani. It uses the same Ang 360 apparatus as the companion lament, *No One Heeded the Dead*. Readers may cross-check the Gurmukhi line, Ang number, Bani heading, Mahala attribution, surrounding passage, and Rahao designation directly against Shabad Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

The statutory claims in this piece were checked against the Police Act, 1861, Section 4; the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, Sections 174 and 176; and public NHRC material. The Punjab Police Rules point is deliberately stated through the NHRC's own formulation rather than by rule number.

Cross-check

Readers are encouraged to verify every statutory citation directly from the primary text, and every factual claim from the official or published sources named below.

Readers are also encouraged to cross-check the Gurbani epigraph directly against Shabad Guru Granth Sahib Ji. SearchGurbani.com and SriGranth.org are suggested reader-facing tools. Guru Granth Darpan may be consulted as teeka and interpretive aid, not as authority above Shabad.

Where this piece refers to a statement made by a named person, it reports that statement as a statement. It does not make the statement a finding.

Where this piece asks a question, it leaves the question as a question.

Correction note

This piece is offered as a record, not as a ruling.

If any reader finds a mismatch in any citation, date, figure, attribution, office-holder tenure, statutory summary, historical detail, Gurmukhi text, transliteration, or plain-English sense, PanthSeva will correct it publicly, calmly, and with a dated note.

A piece that asks for registers to be kept must keep its own the same way.

Source note

The doctrinal and moral frame comes from the Babar Vani line on Ang 360 used in the companion lament. The purpose of this article is documentary: duty, office, file, and unanswered record.

The film facts were checked against current reporting by Variety, Deadline, Free Press Journal, The Tribune, India Today, Times of India, and Economic Times/PTI: *Satluj* was released on ZEE5 on 3 July 2026, removed from the Indian catalogue within two days, and continued internationally on ZEE5 Global. India Today also reported Advocate Navkiran Singh’s objection to the removal and S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji’s public-order explanation, while recording Sidhu Ji’s

statement that the film's story was true and established during the CBI investigation. Reporting of 7 and 8 July 2026 described further proceedings around security, certification, Section 69A / IT Rules, and possible review by an Inter-Departmental Committee; those matters are recorded here as reported positions and proceedings, not as findings.

The 7 July 2026 essay by S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji on the film's removal, from which his fuller position in Section VI is reported, was checked against the published Substack text.

The 7 July note by S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji on Kuldeep Singh SPO was checked against the published Substack text. It is described here only for the point it makes relevant to this article: that the criminal record is now being examined in fine legal detail, while the civil record remains unopened.

The public comment exchange of 7 July 2026 on S. Sidhu Ji's page, including his statements on custody, the Punjab State Archives, and his willingness to engage in good faith with findings placed on record, was checked against the published thread and has been preserved in dated form.

The mass-cremation facts were checked against NHRC, Ensaaf, Human Rights Watch, and Supreme Court material. The NHRC's 3 April 2012 release records 2,097 unidentified bodies remitted by the Supreme Court by order dated 12 December 1996, relief for 1,513 identified deceased, 195 deemed-police-custody cases, and 1,318 other identified cases. Human Rights Watch records the Supreme Court/CBI/NHRC process and the 2,097 illegal-cremation figure. The Supreme Court record in *Prithipal Singh v State of Punjab* records the finding that Bhai Khalra Ji was secretly murdered and his body thrown into the canal near Harike.

The conviction chain was checked against Ensaaf's published case chronology and the primary judicial sequence: trial court convictions on 18 November 2005; Punjab and Haryana High Court decision in

2007 leaving five life convictions; and Supreme Court judgment on 4 November 2011 upholding the convictions and sentences.

The wider-district pattern was checked against Ensaaf's data project, Punjab Disappeared, and HRDAG/Ensaaf work. Punjab Disappeared's 6,140 cremations, 1,400-plus FIRs, and twenty-two-district case-study claims appear on its main documentation materials, not merely on the individual mass-cremations page. These figures are not collapsed into one total because they count different things and arise from different methods. They are used here only to show that the Amritsar record was an opening in a wider documented pattern, not the whole of it.

The statutory framework was checked against Section 4 of the Police Act, 1861, and Sections 174 and 176 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The article uses the NHRC's own wording on Punjab Police Rules rather than citing rule numbers directly.

The official Amritsar district list verifies the Deputy Commissioner tenures for the relevant period and spells the 1992 to 1996 office-holder as "Karanbir Singh Sidhu." This article uses "Karan Bir Singh Sidhu" where following the spacing used in his own public name. The article does not publish the full named schedule of office-holders.

The Tribune figures about FIRs, sanctions, and later police convictions are included only as reported claims attributed to Advocate Sarabjit Singh Verka. They should be checked against judgments and primary records before being used as settled findings.

Important caution on names: S. Karan Bir Singh Sidhu Ji, IAS (Retd.), is not to be confused with any convicted police officer bearing the surname Sidhu. No connection, relation, or implication is made. Advocate Sarabjit Singh Verka is also not to be confused with any civil servant or office-holder bearing the name Sarabjit Singh. Where similar names appear in public records, they refer to different persons unless expressly shown otherwise.

This piece relies on no anonymous source.

This piece is not written against any person. It is written against a frame.

Strong disagreement is welcome. Contempt is not.

Bhul chuk maaf.

Gurjit Singh Sandhu
PanthSeva